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Frank Black's hard, fast rule: 'there ain't no cement in this world'

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A common complaint among those who've followed Frank Black's bumpy 13-year solo career is that, for all of the groundbreaking work he did with his first band, the Pixies, his own work has slowly become something approaching normal.

"Well, yeah, when you start out, it's all about breaking the cliches and being edgy," he said during a phone interview last week. "When you get better at it, you start to fool around with those cliches and embrace them a little bit.

"(Early on), you want to impress everybody and be all dangerous, but that becomes less of a challenge. You want to see if you can get away with sounding really straight, really middle of the road. This might sound like a nice little country-rock song. But then you get into the lyrics or structure, and it's not such a nice little country-rock song."

Then, the man born Charles Michael Kittridge Thompson IV sputters out what might as well be the perfect summation of his entire career to date:

"Whatever rule or standard I might try to apply — well, there ain't no cement in this world."

Born in Boston 41 years ago, Black began writing the songs that would become Pixies classics in high school.

After his sophomore year of college, Black formed a band that could realize his cracked musical and lyrical visions that encompassed surfing, sci-fi and surrealism in somewhat equal doses.

After a run of acclaimed albums, Black disbanded the Pixies in 1993, alerting the media first, then informing his bandmates via fax. Black was expected to carry on the group's burgeoning fame, but instead, fellow Pixie Kim Deal scored big with her band the Breeders.

Black's solo career continued in fits and starts, with four different labels releasing albums of varying quality before the Pixies' reunion was announced in 2003.

Following a debut gig in April 2004 at the Fine Line, the Pixies went on to tour the world and cash in on a decade's worth of buzz. Kurt Cobain, among others, famously claimed the foursome as a vital influence. (Monday night, the Fine Line hosts a screening of the tour documentary "loudQUIETloud: A Film About the Pixies," which Black himself has criticized.)

From that very first reunion gig, rumors of a new Pixies album began circulating. And over the past two years, Black has confirmed, denied and/or waffled when it came time to discuss hitting the studio again.

These days, it's no different. Black told London's New Musical Express last week that rehearsals for a new Pixies record would start in January. But he gave us a different story.

"So, are the Pixies going to record a new album? You'd think we were the fricking Beatles! I keep telling people I don't know. Maybe. People think I'm being manipulative, or I'm hiding information. No, I'm not. I just don't f—— know. It's basically up to her."

"Her," of course, refers to Kim Deal. And it was creative tensions between Deal and Black that splintered

the Pixies the first time around.

But after taking a deep breath and laughing — "I've only had a triple decaf espresso this morning" — Black continued.

"I did talk to (guitarist) Joey Santiago today. I'm putting his brother on the guest list in Boston. And I have talked to Kim. But it was more of a, 'Hey, how's it going? How's the Breeders record coming along?' (Drummer) David Lovering kind of disappears into the world of magic. He's off making doves come out of his sleeve or whatever."

What is sure — beyond Black's current tour in support of his 27-track release "Fast Man Raider Man" — is that he has another solo project in the pipeline.

"It's a live record," he said. "A combination live and studio record and DVD. I'm calling it the 'Frank Black Christmas' package. It's my gift to the world at the beautiful holiday season."

He can't confirm, though, that it'll actually come out before the end of the year: "Who knows? I hope so."

Black has also dropped a few pounds. Early last week, he sat for a new photo shoot, the results of which have yet to be released.

"I was sick of my fat pictures," he said with a laugh. "I did a couple of fasts. And it was also lots of psychological pressure, i.e. nagging from my wife. I was getting into Orson Welles territory."

Press Black any further, though, and you're looking for trouble.

"I have no artistic vision," he said. "I don't have a lot of plans. I just record, that's it. I invite some people along and book a studio. There's no artistic vision. That's how it works for me."

"There's your sneak peek at my world."

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